



November/December 2015

Xplor

SMALL GAME,
BIG FUN

LOOK INSIDE FOR OUR
BEST HUNTING TIPS.



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A bald eagle swoops in for fresh sushi from the Mississippi River near Louisiana, Missouri.

📷 by Noppadol Paothong





GOVERNOR

Jeremiah W. "Jay" Nixon

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Don C. Bedell
James T. Blair, IV
Marilynn J. Bradford
David W. Murphy

DIRECTOR

Robert L. Ziehmer

XPLOR STAFF

Brett Dufur
Les Fortenberry
Karen Hudson
Regina Knauer
Angie Daly Morfeld
Noppadol Paothong
Marci Porter
Mark Raithe
Laura Scheuler
Matt Seek
David Stonner
Nichole LeClair Terrill
Stephanie Thurber
Cliff White

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ON THE COVER

Northern Bobwhite Quail

by Jim Rathert

GET OUT!

DON'T MISS THE CHANCE TO DISCOVER NATURE AT THESE FUN EVENTS



Elk

1

Learn about Missouri's elk at **NATURE CENTER AT NIGHT: MISSOURI'S ELK**. Cape Girardeau Conservation Nature Center. November 12, 5–8 p.m. For details, call 573-290-5218.



2

Sharpen your rifle skills at **BEGINNING YOUTH RIFLE SHOOTING**. Jay Henges Shooting Range in High Ridge. November 28, 8–9:30 a.m. Ages 9–15. Youth must be accompanied by an adult. Register at 636-938-9548.

3

Lace up your boots for a **SHORT-EARED OWL HIKE**. Shawnee Trail Conservation Area near Mindenmines. December 11, 4:30–6 p.m. Ages 8 and older. Register at 417-629-3423.



Short-eared owl

Decorate your tree with **NATURE'S ORNAMENTS**.

Twin Pines Conservation Education Center in Winona. November 28, 10 a.m.–2 p.m. Register at 573-325-1381.



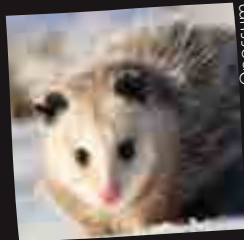
4

5

See the outdoors on the big screen at **NATURE FILM FESTIVAL**.

Burr Oak Woods Conservation Nature Center in Blue Springs.

December 26, 10 a.m.–3 p.m. For more information, call 816-228-3766.



Opossum

There's plenty to discover outdoors in late fall and early winter. Watch for these natural events around these dates.

NOVEMBER 13

Scout for frost flowers after the first hard frost.

NOVEMBER 17

Keep your eyes on the sky for the Leonid meteor shower.

NOVEMBER 20

Fill your pockets as pecans drop from trees.

DECEMBER 3

Barred owls are courting. Listen for: "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?"

DECEMBER 8

Snow goose populations peak at wetlands.

DECEMBER 12

Bald eagles flock to southern Missouri.

DECEMBER 24

Look for woodpeckers at suet feeders: downy, hairy, pileated, and red-bellied.

WHAT IS IT?

DON'T KNOW?
Jump to Page 20 to find out.



- ❶ I like to chill.
- ❷ I only bloom on frosty mornings.
- ❸ I hang out for a few hours, then I'm gone.
- ❹ Sometimes I look like cotton candy. Yum!

Into the WILD field edge



Plants came up with Velcro long before humans. For proof, hike through a brushy field then look at your pants. Chances are they'll be coated with sticktights, small seedpods covered with dense hairs. The hairs stick to fur (and clothing), which helps the seeds hitch a ride to a new place to grow.



Late fall is the perfect time to explore the edges of a brushy field.

LOOK

If you see a tangle of tunnels in the grass, you're likely seeing the work of a vole. Voles are mouse-like rodents with stubby tails. They use sharp teeth to snip grass to eat, building — mouthful by mouthful — tunnels through the vegetation. Mice use the tunnels to search for seeds. Predators, such as weasels and shrews, slink in the shadows, waiting for warm meat.

Take a Closer Look



If canine tracks have you confused, use these clues to tell them apart.

Fox

- ▶ About 2 inches long
- ▶ Oval-shaped
- ▶ Sharp, narrow claws



Coyote

- ▶ 2½ to 3 inches long
- ▶ Oval-shaped
- ▶ Sharp, narrow claws



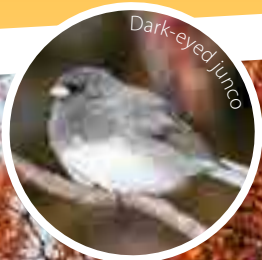
Large Dog

- ▶ 3 to 4 inches long
- ▶ Round-shaped
- ▶ Blunt, wide claws



LOOK

Sparrows are tough to identify, which leads many beginning birdwatchers to label them LBBs: little brown birds. To bone up on sparrow ID, grab binoculars and head to a weedy field in winter. Stand near a brush pile and study the sparrows as they gather seeds. You'll soon spot differences in the birds' colors and patterns that will help you tell them apart.



Dark-eyed junco



Song sparrow



White-crowned sparrow



White-throated sparrow

Heads Up!

Wild rose, blackberry, and many other thorny plants grow along field edges. To avoid becoming a human pincushion, watch where you walk and wear thick pants.

Taste

Smooth sumac's rusty red berries can be used to make a refreshing drink that tastes like lemonade. Have an adult help you collect a dozen berry clusters and shake out the bugs. Submerge the berries in water, and rub them until the water turns pink. Strain the water through a clean towel into a pitcher, add sugar and ice, and drink up.

Smooth sumac, Franklin Bonner, USFS (ret.), Bugwood.org

Do More

Brush piles offer rabbits, quail, and other animals places to escape from predators and shelter from cold, wet weather. To build a brush pile, pick an out-of-the-way location at the edge of a field. Have an adult cut branches and small trees with a chainsaw, then stack them in a tangly pile about head high and 20 feet wide.



Northern bobwhite quail

Did You Know?

In fall and winter, northern bobwhites huddle together in a tight circle with their tails touching and their heads facing outward. This is called a covey, and it helps the birds stay warm and watch for predators.

Alien INVADERS

by Brett Dufur

WE'RE
SURROUNDED!
THE FATE OF
MISSOURI'S
OUTDOORS
IS IN YOUR HANDS

There's a battle being waged against alien invaders that are trying to overrun the outdoors. Alien invaders aren't just from outer space, some come from across state lines. These invaders, often called invasives, include fast-growing, pesky plants and animals that push out Missouri's plants, fish, and wildlife. When these invaders move in, they can ruin the water, food, and shelter that Missouri's animals need to thrive. Your mission is to battle these alien invaders. But beware — it won't be easy. As you encounter each alien invader, we'll radio you your mission.

GO, GO, GO!



THREAT LEVEL
9
EMERALD ASH BORER

David Cappaert, Michigan State University, Bugwood.org



THREAT LEVEL
10
BUSH HONEYSUCKLE

EMERALD ASH BORER

Emerald ash borers are tiny, shiny green beetles that are invading Missouri's forests. These little invaders kill every type of ash tree — even healthy ones.

YOUR MISSION: Don't move firewood around the state — that's how these pesky little insects spread. Buy firewood where you camp. Slowing the spread of emerald ash borers is as easy as that.

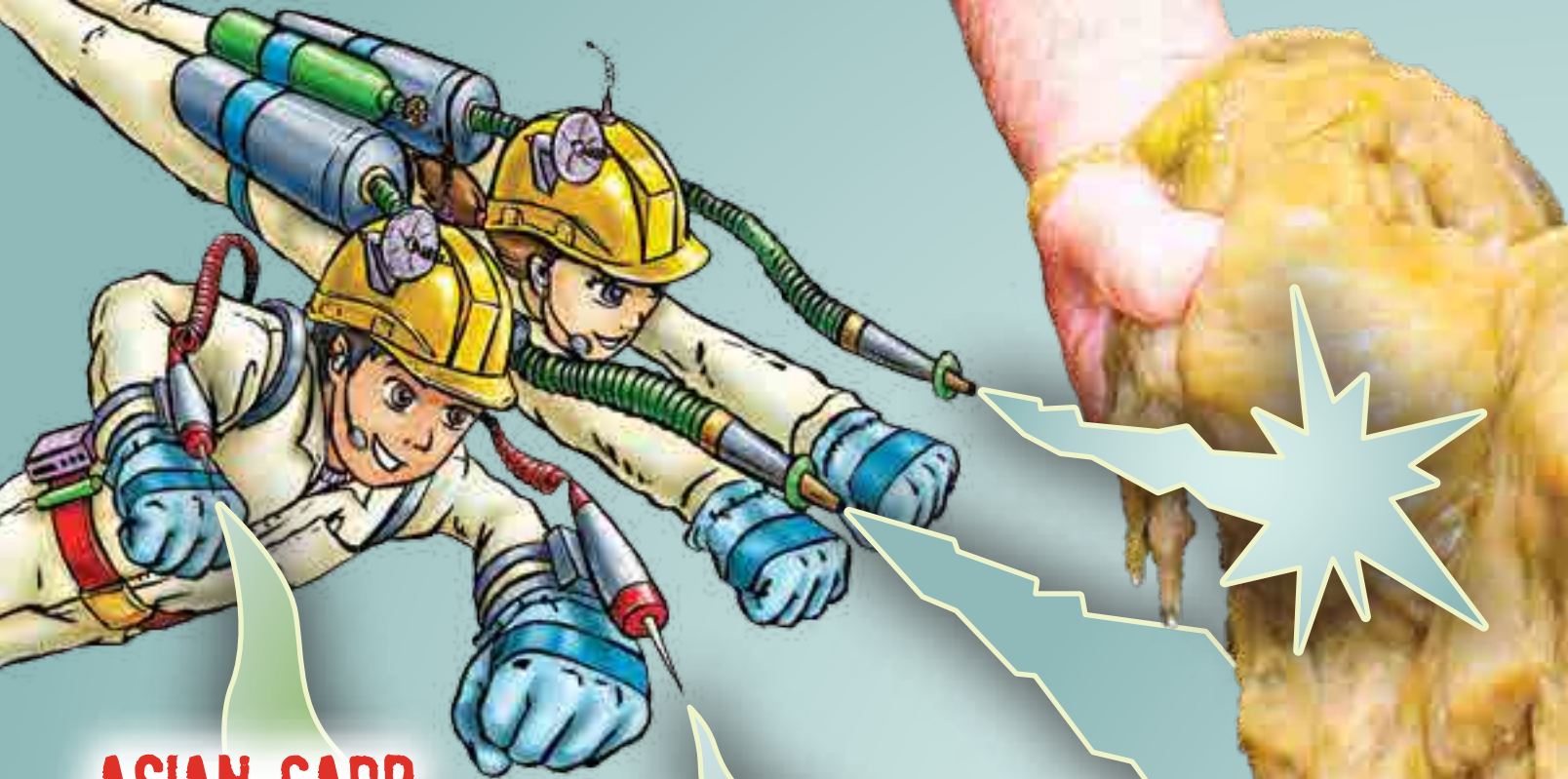
SECONDARY MISSION, IF YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT: Help mission control keep an eye out for ash trees that might already be infested. Look for little D-shaped holes in the bark and dead or dying branches near the top.



BUSH HONEYSUCKLE

Bush honeysuckle thickets are taking over Missouri's woods. This invader greens up before native shrubs and trees and blocks sunlight from anything else that's trying to grow. Birds carry off loads of the honeysuckle berries, which infest other areas.

YOUR MISSION: The best time to start killing bush honeysuckle is today. Try to catch new bushes before they start producing seeds. Pull young plants in the spring. Their early green leaves make them easy to spot. Replace them with native honeysuckle varieties that feed wildlife and keep forests healthy.



ASIAN CARP

Watch out! On Missouri's big rivers, the water behind your boat can explode with jumping fish. Asian carp have been known to jump into canoes, clobber people, and cause all sorts of mayhem. These alien invaders spell trouble for Missouri's waterways because they multiply fast and gobble up all the food that paddlefish and other big river fish rely on.

YOUR MISSION: Chop 'em up or eat 'em. Asian carp make great cut bait for fishing for big blue catfish. If an Asian carp flops in your boat, give it a one-way ticket to your kitchen table. They are good eating!



THREAT LEVEL
9
ASIAN CARP

Courtesy Michigan Sea Grant

Courtesy Fish and
Game New Zealand



DIDYMO

Didymo is nasty! This glop, also called rock snot, is as bad as it sounds. It can make clear streams look like they're covered in soggy toilet paper.

This algae forms thick mats that smother fish eggs and make it harder for fish to feed. Rock snot also makes it impossible to cast a line.

For now, we've kept this invader blocked off at the Arkansas border. Don't let the Show-Me State be next.

YOUR MISSION: Use wader-washing stations at trout parks to keep your fishing gear spick-and-span. At home, clean, drain, and dry your fishing gear and scrub off any snot, er ... algae.



ZEBRA MUSSELS

Zebra mussels are lurking underwater at one of your favorite fishing holes, shouldering out Missouri's native mussels. Hundreds of thousands slowly swarm our lakes in places we can't see, but their impact on fishing and boating is huge. These invaders snarf up vital food supplies and spread quickly.

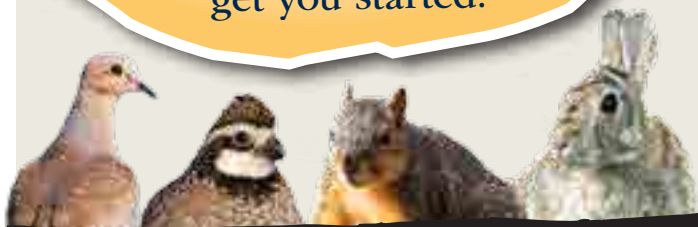
YOUR MISSION: Don't move a mussel. Inspect, clean, drain, and dry your boat and fishing gear every time you move it to another waterway. Power-wash your boat with hot water, drain livewells, and pull your boat plugs to slow the spread of zebra mussels. Give these hitchhikers the boot!



SMALL GAME HUNTING

by Matt Seek

Deer and turkeys are fun to hunt, but if you've never shouldered a gun, why not start with something smaller? Hunting doves, quail, squirrels, and rabbits doesn't require lots of expensive gear, and it's tons of fun. Here are a few tips to get you started.

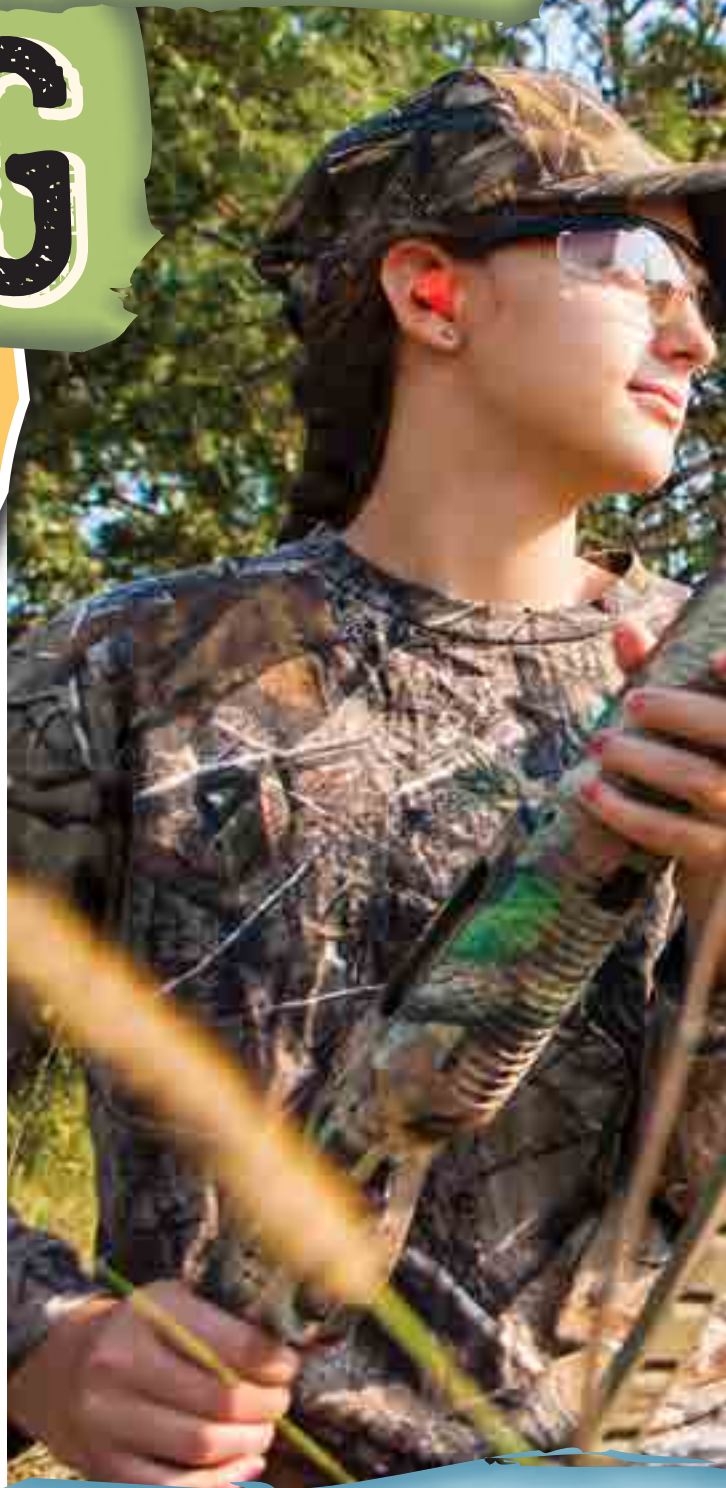


KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Hunting is an activity you learn by doing. The best tip we can offer is to find an experienced hunter to show you the ropes. A good teacher will offer pointers you'd never learn from the pages of a magazine.

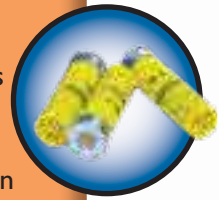
» The Conservation Department offers workshops to help you hone your hunting skills. Find one at mdc.mo.gov/events.

» Pick up a copy of *A Summary of Missouri Hunting and Trapping Regulations* at Conservation Department offices or sporting goods stores. This booklet contains rules you need to follow when hunting.



Looking for a place to hunt?
A conservation area — with good populations of small game — is usually a short drive away. Find one at mdc.mo.gov/atlas.

A **youth-model 20-gauge shotgun** is perfect for hunting small game. Shotguns shoot a cloud of pellets (called shot). Pellets come in different sizes. The number stamped on the side of a shotgun shell tells you the size of the pellets.



For more tips on hunting doves, quail, squirrels, rabbits, and many other small game animals, visit on.mo.gov/1hug4GG.



Nothing is more important than safety. Always hunt with an adult, and learn to safely handle a gun. If you're 11 or older, take a hunter safety course (details at on.mo.gov/1LFGst1).



DOVE

Doves can fly 40 miles per hour, streaking out of gun range in seconds. But speed alone isn't what makes dove hunting fun. The sleek birds corkscrew through the sky in ways that would make a stunt pilot sick. Bagging a dove requires skill and lots of shotgun shells.



Mourning dove

GET OUT

Dove season runs September 1 to November 9, but hunting is usually best the first two weeks. Doves are active in the morning and late afternoon. Crop fields, sunflower fields, and weedy pastures are dove magnets. Doves often perch on dead limbs before dropping to the ground to feed. Setting up next to trees usually offers a close shot.

GAME ON

- » Keep the sun at your back. This will make it easier to see doves and harder for doves to see you.
- » Doves have good eyes and may flare away before they're close enough to shoot, so don't raise your gun until they're in range (30–40 yards away).
- » If you hit a dove, watch it fall all the way to the ground. In a weedy field, downed doves can be impossible to find if you lose sight of where they drop.

Always wear safety glasses and ear protection.

Camouflage clothing helps later in the season when doves have been shot at a lot.

GEAR UP

Insect repellent will keep chiggers, mosquitoes, and ticks at bay.



A 5-gallon bucket is great for packing in gear and makes a good seat.

Dove hunting weather can be toasty, so bring a bottle of water.



Fast-flying doves are hard to hit, so bring lots of shotgun shells with size 7½ or 8 shot.



GEAR UP

An orange vest and hat helps other hunters see you.

Load your gun with number 7½ or 8 shot.

A pouch in the back of your vest is handy for carrying harvested quail.

A candy bar (or three) will provide the energy you need to keep walking.

You'll walk a lot while quail hunting, so wear sturdy hiking boots.

Thick pants will protect your legs from briars and brush.

GET OUT

Quail season runs November 1 to January 15.

Your best bet is to hunt small fields that contain tall grasses, lots of weeds, and patches of shrubs. If the fields are next to woody draws, crop fields, or fencerows, that's even better. Most hunters like to be out and about by midmorning, once the sun has burned off the frost.

GAME ON

» When 10 or 15 quail burst upward at once, focus on a single bird to shoot.

» Shoot only a few quail from each covey. Quail huddle together on chilly nights to stay warm. If a covey contains too few quail, nights can become dangerously cold for the remaining birds.

» Try to hunt with someone who has a bird dog. A well-trained dog will find hidden quail that most people would miss.



QUAIL



Northern bobwhite

Watching a bird dog sniff out a hidden covey of quail is a beautiful thing to behold. And few experiences will make your heart pound harder than having a bobwhite burst out of the weeds beneath your feet like a small, feathered explosion. Just try to remember to shoot!

SQUIRREL

What's not to like about squirrel hunting? Squirrels can be found in nearly any patch of trees. You don't need special gear to hunt them. And as a meal, bushytails taste better than nearly any other game animal.



Fox squirrel

GET OUT

Squirrel season runs from late May to mid-February. To find squirrels, learn to ID trees. In June, mulberry trees offer a sweet feast for hungry squirrels. In August and September, oaks and hickories drop a buffet of nuts. Hit the woods early in the morning or late in the afternoon when squirrels search for food.

GAME ON

» Walk slowly and stop often to listen and scan the treetops. If you find a pile of nut shells, sit nearby and watch for bushytails.

» To find squirrels, shake the branch of a low-growing tree and bark like a squirrel: *cherk, cherk, cherk*. Nearby squirrels will usually bark back.

» Try to shoot when a squirrel peeks from behind a branch and only its head is visible. Head shots limit the number of pellets in the meat.

GEAR UP

Camouflage helps you blend in as you sneak through the trees.

Ticks can be thick in the squirrely woods. To keep bloodsuckers at bay, spray your clothes with permethrin.

Weather during squirrel season is often hot, so pack plenty of water.

Sturdy boots are best, but tennis shoes work fine.

Use shells loaded with number 6s.

A small foam pad, like one used for boating, makes sitting more comfortable.

GET OUT

Rabbit season runs October 1 to February 15. Rabbits thrive in weedy areas that have plenty of thickets, briars, and brush piles to hide in. Many hunters don't hit the fields until the first snow, but good hunting can be had in October when rabbit numbers are often higher. Late afternoon, especially if there's snow on the ground, is a prime time to hunt.

GAME ON

» Kicking brush piles, brier brambles, and patches of shrubby cover will often cause a rabbit to dart out. Wait for the rabbit to run into an open, brush-free area before taking a shot.

» A good way to find where rabbits are hiding is to follow their tracks in newly fallen snow.

» Hunting with beagles is tons of fun, but be careful! In tall brush, it's easy to mistake a short-legged dog for a long-eared rabbit.



Insulated boots will keep your toes toasty.

Rabbit hunting can be chilly, so wear a stocking cap to keep your noggin warm.

GEAR UP

An orange vest and hat helps other hunters see you.

A thermos of cocoa will warm you up from the inside out.



Shotgun shells loaded with number 6 shot work great for rabbits.



Brier-proof pants will protect you from thorns and brush.



Eastern cottontail

RABBIT

Following a barking beagle as it boogies through the brush chasing bunnies is one of the best ways to spend a snowy winter day. But you don't need a dog to hunt rabbits. Walking through a few fields or meadows is sure to scare up some cottontails.

THIS
ISSUE:

Illustrated by
David Besenger

PEREGRINE FALCON VS NORTHERN PINTAIL

Sky Diver

Peregrine falcons are the world's fastest birds. Rocketing down like a comet, their dives can start a half-mile above their prey and reach 260 miles per hour.

Eyes on the Prize

An extra pair of see-through eyelids act like built-in goggles to help the peregrine maintain razor-sharp focus during its dives.

Dive Bomber

Bull's-eye! With talons outstretched, a peregrine can strike a duck with enough force to stun or kill it.

Wide Eyes

A pintail has a super-wide view thanks to eyes on the sides of its head. Ducks see three times farther than humans, making a duck's vision its most powerful sense.

Feathered Friends

Pintails join large flocks with all sorts of other ducks. Flying in flocks gives them a thousand eyes in the sky to watch out for falcons.

Fast Fliers

Pintails are strong, fast fliers. Their wings are swept-back, rather than straight out like other ducks. Pintails can take flight easily by leaping right up from the water's surface.

AND THE
WINNER IS...

The pintail's sharp eyesight saw the peregrine fixing for a dive from half a mile away. It quickly headed toward safety, but was unable to escape the falcon, nature's feathered speeding bullet.

STRANGE but TRUE!

YOUR GUIDE TO ALL THE
UNUSUAL, UNIQUE,
AND **UNBELIEVABLE** STUFF
THAT GOES ON IN NATURE

When it isn't hanging in hallways causing couples to kiss, **MISTLETOE** grows in trees. Birds eat the plant's berries, which are filled with sticky jelly and a single seed. When birds poop, the seeds stick to branches, take root, and begin growing.



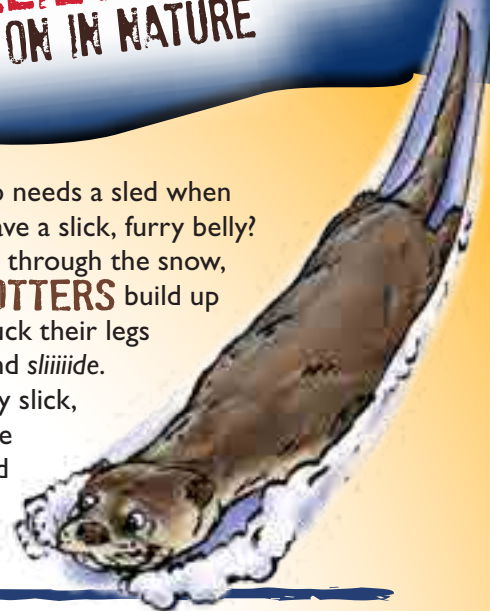
To keep from turning into *frogsicles*, some **BULLFROGS** burrow into mud at the bottom of rivers and ponds during winter. But being snug as a frog in the mud has drawbacks. If oxygen runs low, the frog must swim to a new spot or it could croak.

When weather turns nippy, **FLYING SQUIRRELS** snuggle together inside hollow trees. Their furry bodies can warm the den by 30 degrees, and the more squirrels there are, the toastier it gets. Fifty squirrels have been found packed into a single tree!



Tower, we're going to need a longer runway. To take flight, **AMERICAN COOTS** pitter-patter across the water's surface, flapping their wings furiously. The chubby birds must run for several yards to get airborne.

Who needs a sled when you have a slick, furry belly? To move through the snow, **RIVER OTTERS** build up speed then tuck their legs to their sides and *sliiiiide*. If a slope is really slick, otters often slide down it over and over again just for fun.



When insects are scarce, **WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCHES** go nuts for nuts. The little birds, which are often seen creeping headfirst down trees, are named for their habit of cramming acorns into bark then pecking them open to "hatch" out the seed.



Bad ear day: An **OPOSSUM'S** ears and tail are practically hairless. This can cause problems in winter. Without fur to keep them warm, the tips of these body parts often freeze and fall off.



HOW TO

Start a One-Match Fire

What if you were lost in the winter woods and the only thing keeping you from turning into a *yousicle* was one wooden match? You'd better make it count.

FIND A SAFE SPOT TO BUILD A FIRE

Pick a place that's sheltered from wind, rain, and snow. Brush away everything on the ground that could ignite — leaves, pine needles, grass — until you get down to bare dirt or rock. The bare area should be a circle at least 5 feet wide.

GATHER WOOD

- You'll need three kinds of wood: **tinder**, **kindling**, and **fuel**.
- The driest wood comes from dead limbs that are still hanging in trees. Wood lying on the ground is usually too damp to burn.
- If a stick doesn't give a crisp **SNAP!** when you break it, toss it back into the woods.
- Evergreen trees, such as cedars and pines, often have dead, dry branches attached low to the ground and close to their trunks.



Tinder is dry, fluffy material that easily ignites, such as paper, pine needles, dead grass, birch bark, or cattail fluff. You'll need a fist-sized wad of tinder to start your fire.

Kindling lights easily and burns long enough to catch bigger branches on fire. Look for bone-dry twigs that are thicker than a matchstick but thinner than a pencil. Collect at least two armfuls.

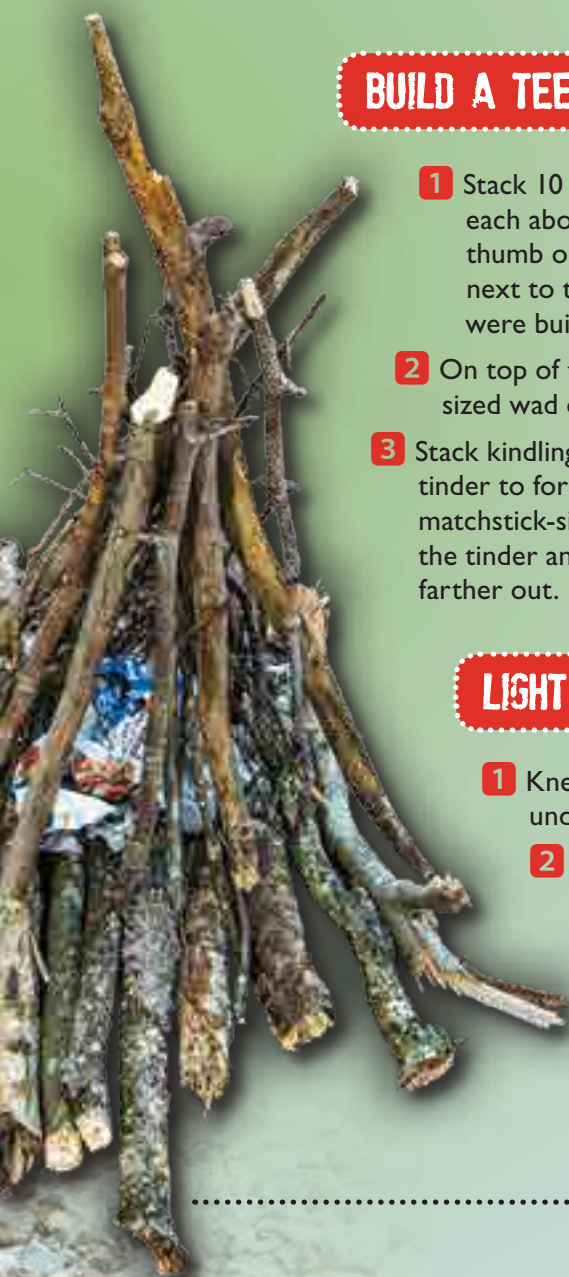
Fuel is made up of larger branches that will burn from several minutes to several hours. As long as it's dry, anything from finger-sized branches to leg-sized logs will work. Two or three armfuls should get you started.

BUILD A TEEPEE

- 1 Stack 10 sticks that are each about as thick as your thumb on the ground, one next to the other, as if you were building a tiny raft.
- 2 On top of the raft, place a fist-sized wad of tinder.
- 3 Stack kindling upright around the tinder to form a teepee. Place matchstick-sized twigs closest to the tinder and pencil-sized twigs farther out.

LIGHT THAT SUCKER

- 1 Kneel with your back to the wind. Keep your knees together so air can't blow underneath you and put out the match.
- 2 Make a small opening in the teepee so you can see the tinder inside.
- 3 Carefully strike the match. Once it lights, cup your hands around it and move it slowly into the teepee to light the tinder.
- 4 You may need to blow gently on the tinder to coax up a flame.
- 5 When the kindling is burning, add bigger sticks. Be careful not to knock over the teepee.
- 6 Add fuel until the fire is as large as you want it to be. Whew! Now you can relax, warm up your toes, and bust out the s'mores.



XPLOR MOR

Crazy Critter Carols

Whoever wrote
this holiday song left out a few words. Fill in the
list below, then match each answer to its corresponding
number in the song. Some answers will be used more than once.

List

1. Name: _____
2. Color: _____
3. Body part: _____
4. Missouri animal: _____
5. Adjective: _____
6. Verb that ends in "s": _____
7. Verb: _____
8. Adjective: _____
9. Recreational activity: _____
10. Adjective: _____
11. Holiday: _____
12. Name: _____
13. Adjective: _____
14. Method of transportation: _____
15. Verb that ends in "ed": _____
16. Emotion: _____
17. School subject: _____

♪ Song ♪

I. _____ the 2. _____ - 3. _____ ed 4. _____,
Had a very 5. _____ 3. _____.
And if you ever saw him,
You would even say it 6. _____.
All of the other 4. _____,
Used to 7. _____ **and call him names.**
They never let 8. _____ I. _____,
Join in any 4. _____ 9. _____.
Then one 10. _____ 11. _____,
 12. _____ **came to say:**
"I. _____ with your 3. _____ **so** 13. _____,
Won't you guide my 14. _____ **tonight?"**
Then all the 4. _____ 15. _____,
And they shouted out with 16. _____,
"I. _____ the 2. _____ **-** 3. _____ **ed** 4. _____,
you'll go down in 17. _____."



WHAT IS IT?

— FROM PAGE 3 —

Frost flowers aren't really flowers at all. They're delicate, beautiful ribbons of ice crystals. Frost flowers form when sap freezes inside a plant's stem. As more sap rises from the roots, the ice crystals push out, forming unique shapes. Look for these rare winter delights after a cold snap, before the morning sun melts them away.



RE

Stocking Switcheroo

Forget sugar plums, these predators have visions of prey dancing in their dreams. But someone stuffed the stockings out of order.

Can you match each catnapping carnivore to its favorite stocking?

Hint:

Some of these animals would be happy with more than one stocking, but there's only one way to match the stockings so that every animal is happy.



Bobcat River otter Bullfrog Speckled kingsnake Great horned owl



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FREE TO MISSOURI HOUSEHOLDS

CRITTER CORNER Elk



When you are in the Ozarks, listen for the unforgettable squeal of an elk. Elk are a chatty bunch. Male elk, called bulls, bugle to attract females, called cows. Bulls also bugle to show their dominance over other males. They grunt when cows stray from their harem. Cows bark to warn of danger, mew to keep track of each other, and whine softly to signal to their calves. Hear an elk bugle at xplormo.org/node/11280.